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State features SMC in 'best practices' video

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Southwestern Michigan College Board of Trustees received a presentation from the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth (MDLEG), opened bids for construction of the student housing project and the renovation of the student activity center, accepted gifts and grants and conducted other business during the May meeting Tuesday on the Dowagiac campus.

MDLEG chose SMC recently to be featured in a "best practices" video regarding its efforts with the State of Michigan's "No Worker Left Behind" initiative.

"As I visit the academic institutions across the state, I see a lot of really neat things," said Dr. Ron Harkness Ph.D., CRC, manager, Office of Postsecondary Services, Community College Services Unit for MDLEG. "If we don't share it with others, it would go unnoticed."

Sharing the good that other colleges were doing led Harkness to the idea of creating "best practices" videos.

"Why reinvent the wheel?" Harkness said. "Today, everyone's budgets are tight. If we can create mechanisms like these videos to help other institutions learn and improve their strategies, then we should. Everyone's goal is the same: help people succeed."

Southwestern Michigan College's initiatives with No Worker Left Behind caught Harkness's attention enough to suggest the idea of featuring SMC in a "best practices" video.

"SMC has a lot to be proud of," Harkness said.

"You are able to take a state initiative (No Worker Left Behind) and implement strategies to offer great educational opportunities for many people."

One element of SMC's initiative that stood out to Harkness was the Bridging Scholarships that SMC created, which provided a way for those who may be waiting for funding approval to move forward faster than state or federal red tape would have otherwise permitted.

"The Bridging Scholarship is so unique. I have not yet heard of any other institution doing this. The scholarship allows for educational funding, which can truly help people. For many people it has made the difference in terms of being able to attend college."

As manager of the Office of Postsecondary Services, Community College Services Unit, Harkness's responsibilities include visiting academic institutions across the state to monitor the use of Carl D. Perkins Grant funding. Part of the reporting requirements include quantitative data, however, Harkness stated that qualitative data is also an important part of the reporting system. And, videos such as SMC's Best Practices with No Worker Left Behind help with that.

"To actually capture on video the lives that have been affected is very powerful," Harkness said.

So powerful, in fact, that the MDLEG Best Practices videos have started to receive national attention.

Harkness stated his first intention was to use these videos as part of professional development at the annual statewide dean's in-service conference. He has also shown the videos at many other state and federal conferences and events. Other MDLEG video topics include: welding, high-tech manufacturing and ice carving.